

# AN EXAMINATION OF THE EXTERNAL AND INTERNAL FORCES THAT HAVE SHAPED THE DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS

A Monograph

by

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## ABSTRACT

AN EXAMINATION OF THE EXTERNAL AND INTERNAL FORCES THAT HAVE SHAPED THE DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS, by Mr. Shane W. Burge, DVA, 65 pages.

The intent of this monograph is to research the internal and external shaping forces that have changed the Department of Veterans Affairs (DVA) at the strategic and operational level. The history of DVA, major legislative, executive, and judicial shaping forces have molded the department. However, the scandals of Charles Forbes and the Army actions against the Bonus Army made lasting impressions on the department. The modern DVA was created when a partnership of Veterans Service Organizations and the Federal Government worked together to address Veterans service needs. Improving the modern version of that partnership will remediate past issues and increase planning for evolutionary changes rather than reactionary changes.

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Semper Vigilans.

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## ACRONYMS

ADM	Army Design Methodology
CARL	Combined Arms Research Library
CGSCC	U.S. Army Command and General Staff College
CIO	Chief Information Officer
DAV	Disabled American Veterans
DOD	Department of Defense
DVA	Department of Veterans Affairs (1988 – present)
FBU	Federal Bureau of Investigation
IT	Information Technology
MMAS	Master of Military Art and Science
NCA	National Cemetery Association
PMAS	Program Management and Accountability System
SAMS	School of Advanced Military Studies
VA	Veterans Administration (1930-1988)
VACO	Veterans Affairs Central Office
VALU	Veterans Affairs Learning University
VAMC	Veterans Affairs Medical Center
VB	Veterans Bureau
VBA	Veterans Benefits Administration
VHA	Veterans Health Administration
VLER	Virtual Lifetime Electronic Record
VSO	Veterans Service Organizations

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## INTRODUCTION

In 2008, while running for election to the Presidency of the United States, Senator Barack Obama made a speech in Austin, TX. He stated, “America enters into a sacred trust with every single person who puts on the uniform.” He further stated, “America will be there for you, just as you have been there for America. Keeping that trust must always be a core American value, and a cornerstone of American patriotism...it must never end.” He ended those remarks by stating “...Washington has failed to uphold that sacred trust.”<sup>1</sup> Later in 2008, President-Elect Obama nominated General Eric Shinseki, U.S. Army (Ret.) for Secretary of the Department of Veterans Affairs. During the nomination process the President-Elect stated “It's time to build a truly 21st century DVA (Department of Veterans Affairs)" and restated his focus on “the sacred trust between America and her troops.”<sup>2</sup> During his confirmation hearings, General Shinseki testified on restoring and developing trust with veterans, stating, “My experience is that there is nothing that builds trust faster than performance and delivering on promises, and that is what we intend to do.”<sup>3</sup> President Obama and Secretary Shinseki’s commitment to restore trust in veteran’s services has shaped the agency, but there have been other shaping forces. The purpose of this monograph is to examine the major internal and external forces that have shaped the agency into the modern DVA. Identifying these forces will show how the DVA has changed to support veterans at the

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<sup>1</sup>Barack Obama, “Obama Pledges ‘Sacred Trust’ with Veterans,” Press Release, Austin, TX, 29 February 2008.

<sup>2</sup>Don McSwain, “General Eric Shinseki nominated as United States Secretary of Veterans Affairs” 7 December 2008, [http://change.gov/newsroom/entry/general\\_eric\\_shinseki\\_nominated\\_as\\_united\\_states\\_secretary\\_of\\_Veterans\\_affa/](http://change.gov/newsroom/entry/general_eric_shinseki_nominated_as_united_states_secretary_of_Veterans_affa/) (accessed 25 January 2014).

<sup>3</sup>General Eric Shinseki, Department of Veterans Affairs, (accessed 24 February 2014) <http://www.va.gov/opa/publications/celebrate/vamotto.pdf>.

strategic and operational level, and assist the DVA in planning for evolutionary changes rather than reactionary changes.

## VA HISTORY

The Department of Veterans Affairs, with over 450,000 employees, is the nation's second largest cabinet level department. Second only to the Department of Defense's 720,000 personnel, DVA has more personnel than the next two largest departments combined.<sup>4</sup> DVA personnel are working to support veterans across 13 time zones in all 50 U.S. states, 5 U.S. territories, the Republic of the Philippines, and the Republic of Korea. What eventually became the modern DVA began in 1930 when the U.S. Congress formally established the Veterans Administration. However, elements of the DVA had informally existed since before Lincoln's second inaugural address and call for action. In fact, before the United States was a country, the Continental Congress had established a pension system for disabled veterans of the Continental Army.<sup>5</sup> In 1789, the pension system expanded to include Revolutionary War veterans who served in state and local militias. In 1813, the pension program expanded again to include veterans of the War of 1812. With the increasing number of pensioners, Congress created the Federal Bureau of Pensions in 1833. The following year, the first home for veterans opened in Philadelphia to care for disabled Navy veterans.<sup>6</sup> These two organizations became the seed of the modern day Veterans Benefit Administration (VBA) and Veterans Health Administration (VHA). However,

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<sup>4</sup>The Department of Homeland Security has 200,000 personnel and the Department of Justice has 118,000 personnel.

<sup>5</sup>Department of Veterans Affairs, *The Origin of the VA Motto* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2009), 1, <http://www.va.gov/opa/publications/celebrate/vamotto.pdf> (accessed 14 February 2014).

<sup>6</sup>ABC-CLIO, Inc., *Encyclopedia of the Veteran in America*, ed. William Pencak (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, Inc., 2009), XLIII.

the real call to action, and internal force that launched the DVA, occurred during the Civil War at Gettysburg, PA, 1-4 July 1863.

The Battle of Gettysburg was the culminating point of the Confederacy during the Civil War and the largest land battle ever to occur in the Western Hemisphere. Over 51,000 American soldiers died during the battle and 24,000 wounded required medical attention.<sup>7</sup> Four months later, President Lincoln delivered his famous address at the battlefield. It is true the address was as a turning point in public opinion of the Civil War, but President Lincoln delivered his most decisive call to action for veterans during his second inaugural address. The 1864 presidential election pitted Lincoln against General George B. McClellan, once the commander of the Army of the Potomac and Lincoln's subordinate. As Election Day approached, Lincoln's hopes for a second term was in question until the capture of Atlanta by General William T. Sherman. Combined with the defeat of Confederate General Jubal Early by General Phillip Sheridan during the valley campaign, and successes on the Richmond front sealed the election for President Lincoln. Moreover, Lincoln had the support of Federal troops when nearly 78 percent of Union Soldiers voted in his favor.<sup>8</sup>

It was during his second inaugural address, and on the heels of the restoration of the Union with the ending of the war, that President Lincoln committed the nation to our veterans with these words:

With malice toward none; with charity for all; with firmness in the right, as God gives us to see the right, let us strive on to finish the work we are in; to bind up the nation's wounds; to care for him who shall have borne the battle, and for his widow, and

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<sup>7</sup>Geoffrey C. Ward, with Ric Burns and Ken Burns, *The Civil War* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1994), 236.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid.

his orphan—to do all which may achieve and cherish a just, and a lasting peace, among ourselves, and with all nations.<sup>9</sup>

Almost a century later, Veterans Administration Director Sumner G. Whittier first used the phrase, “To care for him who shall have borne the battle, and for his widow, and his orphan,” as the official motto of the DVA.<sup>10</sup>

## LEGISLATED INTO SERVICE

After the Civil War, the 39th U.S. Congress created seventy national cemeteries to inter Union soldiers.<sup>11</sup> The act also established a system of physical buildings and yearly inspections that became the genesis of the National Cemetery Administration (NCA). By 1866, three main branches of service for benefits, health, and cemeteries were established. These branches eventually became the VBA, VHA, and NCA, but much work remained before three semi-independent branches came together as the modern DVA.

Also in 1866, the first national asylum for disabled Civil War veterans opened in Togus, Maine. President Lincoln signed the national home bill into law only one month before his assassination in 1865.<sup>12</sup> In 1873, the asylum system changed to the National Home for Disabled Volunteer Soldiers. They were similar to retirement homes, and while not a hospital system, became the first structures built for the health and welfare of veterans. The National Home for Disabled Volunteer Soldier built an additional ten homes before incorporation into the Veterans

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<sup>9</sup>Abraham Lincoln, *President Abraham Lincoln's Second Inaugural Address* (Washington, DC: Library of Congress, 4 March 1865).

<sup>10</sup>Department of Veterans Affairs, *The Origin of the VA Motto*.

<sup>11</sup>U.S. Congress, House, *An Act to establish National Cemeteries*, H.R. 288, 39th Cong., 26 July 1866 (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 26 July 1866).

<sup>12</sup>Department of Veterans Affairs, *VA History in Brief* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2008), 5.

Administration in 1930. The homes were located in Milwaukee, WI; Dayton, OH; Hampton, VA; Leavenworth, KS; Santa Monica, CA; Marion, IN; Danville, IL; Johnson City, TN; Hot Springs, SD; and Bath, NY. The Hampton, VA facility was actually built for African American veterans while the Hot Springs, SD facility was a hospital rather than a home, making it the only medical facility in the system.<sup>13</sup>

The last quarter of the 19th century was ripe with Congressional legislative actions that further transformed veterans services. The 1870 Homestead Act provided any who served for a minimum of 90 days 160 acres of free land, while the Arrears of Pension Act allowed veterans to receive benefits from the date of their wartime disability. Mexican War veterans were finally eligible for benefits with the passage of the 1887 Mexican-American War Veterans Pension act and the 1887 Mexican American War act. Fittingly enough, one of the last major legislative acts of the 19th century completed the promise President Lincoln made during his second inaugural address when Congress passed the 1890 General Pension act. The act provided a pension for any Union Veteran with a disability, and finally provided benefits to dependents.<sup>14</sup> To date, war had shaped veterans services and the new century appeared no different from the last with America's preparation for, and entry into, the First World War.

## WORLD WAR I

From a DVA perspective, America's preparation for war actually began in 1914 with the passage of the War Risk Insurance Bill. Upon the opening of hostilities among the European powers in August 1914, Congress began to draft legislation to protect U.S. shipping interests.

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<sup>13</sup>U.S. National Park Service, *History of the National Home for Disabled Volunteer Soldiers* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2013), [http://www.nps.gov/nr/travel/Veterans\\_affairs/History.html](http://www.nps.gov/nr/travel/Veterans_affairs/History.html) (accessed 19 November 2013).

<sup>14</sup>Department of Veterans Affairs, *VA History in Brief*, 5.

Therefore, less than a month after the European war began, Congress passed the War Risk Insurance Act (S.6357).<sup>15</sup> The act offered government backed insurance on U.S. flagged vessels and encouraged the merchant service to continue shipping operations during the early phases of the war. However, the original act only insured ships hulls, and the value of cargo, in the event of damage or sinking by enemy combatants. It did not address loss of life and limb by the crew. Therefore, the act was modified to include “Masters, officers, and seaman” against injury or loss of life during the war and again in October of 1917 to include “Military and Naval service members.”<sup>16</sup> Although, not a direct compensation program for veterans, the War Risk Insurance program quickly became the largest provider of services to returning World War I veterans. By the end of the war, Director Richard G. Cholmeley-Jones reported over 900,000 applications had been received by the bureau. By 1920, the bureau mailed over 4.5 million applications for insurance and received over 1.6 million responses.<sup>17</sup> The total expenditure for 1920 claims was over \$500 million making the bureau one of the largest financial institutions in the world.<sup>18</sup> Subsequent amendments to the law added children as beneficiaries and added any U.S. combatant force (e.g. Coast Guard, Marine Corps, and naval reserve) as applicable participants in the program.<sup>19</sup> The program further increased its scope by adding vocational rehabilitation services in

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<sup>15</sup>U.S. Congress, *War Risk Insurance Soldiers Compensation and Insurance Laws and Soldier and Sailors Civil Rights Act*, 65th Cong. (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1914).

<sup>16</sup>Ibid.

<sup>17</sup>4,631,993 applicants and 1,666,607 responses

<sup>18</sup>Richard G. Cholmeley-Jones, “War Risk Insurance,” *Scientific Monthly* (1921): 234.

<sup>19</sup>U.S. Congress, *War Risk Insurance Soldiers Compensation and Insurance Laws*.

1917 and even provided for friendly foreign nation ship's hull insurance coverage if they could not obtain it elsewhere.<sup>20</sup>

The first director of the War Risk Insurance bureau was Henry Dickinson Lindsley. A politician and banker, Lindsley served as mayor of Dallas, TX until America's entry into the war. He ended the war as a Colonel having earned the Distinguished Service Medal for his service as War Risk Insurance Bureau Director.<sup>21</sup> He left the bureau in 1919 to be a founding member of the American Legion along with notables such as Theodore Roosevelt, Jr. and John J. Pershing.<sup>22</sup> The very capable Richard G. Cholmeley-Jones (see Figure 3 in Appendix D) followed Lindsley as the next War Insurance Director. Cholmeley-Jones not only oversaw the rapid expansion of the War Insurance Bureau, but was instrumental in forging a long-lasting relationship with the American Legion. He recognized the importance of organizations such as the American Legion as agents of change for veteran's service and ultimately invited the entire membership to a conference in Washington, DC where the American Legion National Commander, state commanders, and government officials planned veterans services.<sup>23</sup> As productive as the conference was, the War Risk Insurance Bureau was at a capability limit by organization and mission. The First World War highlighted the need for a centralized system to manage veterans services.

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<sup>20</sup>U.S. Congress, *War Risk Insurance Soldiers Compensation and Insurance Laws*.

<sup>21</sup>Texas State Historical Association, *Handbook of Texas Online*, Texas State Historical Association: A digital Gateway to Texas History 15 June 2010, <http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/fli10> (accessed 19 January 2014).

<sup>22</sup>U.S. Congress, House, House Subcommittee on Military Affairs, *BG Times—Reorganization of the Army*, 65th Cong., 1st sess., 1919 (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1919).

<sup>23</sup>"The American Legion War Risk Insurance Conference" (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1919).

U.S. participation in World War I formally began with a Declaration of War on April 6, 1917.<sup>24</sup> When the U.S. entered the war, the Army had a standing force of only 113,111 officers and men. The National Guard was larger than the standing Army and could field 185,000 personnel, but were under the command of State Governors.<sup>25</sup> By the end of the War in November 1918, American forces in Europe numbered 1,473,190 personnel and the total force was 4.7 million soldiers, sailors, marines, and airmen.<sup>26</sup> While battle losses were light compared to other allied forces, the U.S. still suffered 320,518 casualties during the war, or approximately 0.12 percent of the U.S. population.<sup>27</sup> Veteran's services and benefits had to expand in order to manage the losses and the increased demand of nearly five million returning troops. To address the large numbers of wounded returning veterans, in 1920, Congress established a disability and rehabilitation program. This program also benefited active duty personnel by providing insurance in the event of disability while on federal service. The last modification to the insurance program incorporated those departments within the Public Health Service providing medical examinations for benefits, and the Federal Board of Vocational Education.<sup>28</sup>

The War Risk Insurance Bureau, as an insurance organization, was exceeding its capabilities as a service provider. In fact, Director Chomeley-Jones was encouraging the creation of a single agency to manage and administer the disparate services as early as 1920.<sup>29</sup> The new

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<sup>24</sup>Allan R. Millett, Peter Maslowski, and William B. Feis, *For The Common Defense: A Military History of the United States from 1607 to 2012* (New York: Free Press, 2012), 311.

<sup>25</sup>*Ibid.*, 312.

<sup>26</sup>*Ibid.*, 681.

<sup>27</sup>*Ibid.*, 337.

<sup>28</sup>U.S. Congress, *War Risk Insurance Soldiers Compensation and Insurance Laws*.

<sup>29</sup>Cholmeley-Jones, "War Risk Insurance," 234.

program passed congress in late 1920 and the process of centralizing services began with the creation of the Veterans Bureau. The new bureau incorporated the War Risk Insurance Bureau and certain departments within the Public Health Service pertaining to medical examinations of veterans.<sup>30</sup> The organization was headquartered in the old War Risk Insurance headquarters building at 810 Vermont Ave NW in Washington DC; the current site of DVA's central offices. Even though the Veterans Bureau consolidated some veteran's services, the Bureau of Pensions and the National Home for Disabled Volunteer Soldiers remained independent agencies.<sup>31</sup>

While the National Homes for Disabled Volunteer Soldiers remained essentially unchanged since its creation, the Bureau of Pensions of the Interior had a more tumultuous history. Beginning in 1808, the Secretary of War managed the pension program.<sup>32</sup> The program was reorganized in 1833 under the War Department and remained there until 1849. Then in a span of less than one year the bureau bounced to the Navy Department and then back to the Department of the Interior.<sup>33</sup> Both the National Home for Disabled Veterans and the Bureau of Pensions continued to operate as independent agencies until their incorporation into the Veterans Administration in 1930. Meanwhile, the Veterans bureau forged ahead in centralizing other veterans services.

#### FORGED BY SCANDAL

The newly created Veterans Bureau (VB) was to be the hub of Veteran's services and consolidate programs into a single service provider. With over 4 million veterans returning from

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<sup>30</sup>U.S. Congress, *War Risk Insurance Soldiers Compensation and Insurance Laws*.

<sup>31</sup>U.S. National Park Service, *History of the National Home for Disabled Volunteer Soldiers*.

<sup>32</sup>Department of Veterans Affairs, *VA History in Brief*, 4.

<sup>33</sup>*Ibid*.

service in World War I, the Veterans Bureau had a large budget to provide health and benefits including responsibility for new hospital construction contracts. War Risk Insurance Director Chomeley-Jones encouraged the consolidation of services, but was unable to complete the centralization; he succumbed to illness in 1921 at age 38.<sup>34</sup> President Warren G. Harding nominated Charles Forbes to finish Cholmeley-Jones term at War Risk Insurance and later to the position of Veterans Bureau Director in 1920 (See Figure 4 in Appendix D). Forbes, who made \$10,000 per year as Director, controlled a VB budget of over \$500 million dollars.<sup>35</sup> He was also responsible for construction contracts to build veterans hospitals across the country, and controlled over 5 million dollars in pharmaceutical and supply contracts.<sup>36</sup> A mere nine days after Forbes became Director, President Harding issued Executive Order 3668 moving administration of veterans hospitals from the U.S. Public Health Service to the newly created Veterans Bureau.<sup>37</sup> Then on April 20, 1922, with the passage of the Sweet Bill and the Langley Bill, Forbes directly controlled over 18 million dollars in construction funds for new veterans hospitals.<sup>38</sup> Congress also allocated an additional \$35.6 million dollars for new hospital construction, but had very little oversight on allocating these funds.<sup>39</sup> With accessibility to such funds, and with little oversight, the stage was set for Charles Forbes to begin his betrayal of veterans' trust resulting in the single-most defining force of the modern DVA.

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<sup>34</sup>“R. Chomeley-Jones dies in hospital,” *New York Times*, 22 February 1922.

<sup>35</sup>M. R. Werner, *Privileged Characters* (New York: Robert M. McBride and Company, 1935), 194.

<sup>36</sup>*Ibid.*, 218.

<sup>37</sup>*Ibid.*, 194

<sup>38</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>39</sup>*Ibid.*

Who was Charles Forbes? Born in Scotland and having immigrated to the U.S. Pacific Northwest, he established a home of record in Burton, Vashon Island in Washington State.<sup>40</sup> At age 16, Forbes joined the Marine Corps as a drummer and later enlisted in the U.S. Army. For his service in World War I, he earned the Legion of Honor and the Distinguished Service Medal as a Lieutenant Colonel in the Signal Corps.<sup>41</sup> After the war, he began a career in shipping, and secured a posting under President Wilson to oversee the construction of the naval base in Oahu, HI.<sup>42</sup> It was in Hawaii that Forbes met Senator-Elect Warren G. Harding of Ohio. By all accounts, Forbes made a favorable impression on Harding; so much so that upon learning of Harding's intent to run for the Presidency in 1920, Forbes travelled from Hawaii to Ohio to join Harding's campaign.<sup>43</sup> Forbes was instrumental in winning the electoral vote of his adopted home for Harding.<sup>44</sup> After the election, Forbes lobbied for the position of Chairman of the United States Shipping Board, but Harding refused.<sup>45</sup> Florence Harding, the President's wife, convinced President Harding to appoint Forbes as Director of the War Risk Insurance Bureau.<sup>46</sup> He remained at War Risk until appointed Director of the Veterans Bureau in 1920. Although not

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<sup>40</sup>“Col. C. Forbes dies; Led Veterans Unit; Retired Army Officer, Director of Bureau under Harding; Jailed After Senate Inquiry,” *New York Times*, 11 April 1952, <http://projects.militarytimes.com/citations-medals-awards/recipient.php?recipientid=17542> (accessed 20 January 2013).

<sup>41</sup>Werner, *Privileged Characters*, 24.

<sup>42</sup>John W. Dean, *Warren G. Harding: The American Presidents Series: The 29th President, 1921-1923* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, LLC, 2004), 37.

<sup>43</sup>Werner, *Privileged Characters*, 24.

<sup>44</sup>Dean, *Warren G. Harding: The American Presidents Series*, 37.

<sup>45</sup>Werner, *Privileged Characters*, 24.

<sup>46</sup>*Ibid.*

from Ohio, Forbes became a de-facto member of the Harding's "Ohio Gang" and the Teapot Dome Scandal which not only defined Harding's administration, but was instrumental in shaping veterans services.<sup>47</sup>

In a historically significant event in February of 1922, Charles Forbes met Elias H. Mortimer, a representative of the Thompson-Black Construction Company (See Figure 7 in Appendix D). Forbes began a close association with Mortimer and Mortimer's young wife (See Figure 6 in Appendix D). In fact, Forbes had dinner every Sunday with the Mortimer's, and even went on trips to Atlantic City and New York all paid for by Mortimer and Thompson-Black.<sup>48</sup> In the summer of 1922, Forbes asked the Mortimer's to travel with him and visit prospective hospital locations in Livermore, CA, Tacoma, WA, and St. Cloud, MN so that Thompson-Black had "advance information over everyone" on future VB construction bids.<sup>49</sup> The trip started and ended in Chicago, IL where the site for a new \$5,000,000 hospital was to be located. It was in Chicago at the Drake Hotel that Forbes first asked Mortimer and Thompson-Black for \$5,000 in kickback money. Thompson-Black actually gave Mortimer \$15,000, but Mortimer kept \$10,000 (to cover expenses on the trips to California and Washington) and Forbes received \$5,000 in cash.<sup>50</sup> From Chicago the party travelled to the West Coast where another pay-off for a construction land deal occurred in Livermore, CA.<sup>51</sup> From there, Forbes and company traveled via steamship to Washington State. It was on this trip that Forbes made a costly public mistake.

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<sup>47</sup>Dean, *Warren G. Harding: The American Presidents Series*, 143.

<sup>48</sup>Werner, *Privileged Characters*, 2.

<sup>49</sup>*Ibid.*, 198.

<sup>50</sup>*Ibid.*, 199.

<sup>51</sup>*Ibid.*, 203.

During the trip, he presented a medal from Harding's inauguration as if representing President Harding. Word of the false presentation quickly reached back to Washington DC angering President Harding and Forbes spiral into public ignominy began.<sup>52</sup>

Meanwhile, on the steamship cruise in Tacoma, Mortimer solidified the details of the construction kickbacks given to himself, Thompson-Black, and Charles Hurley.<sup>53</sup> The Mississippi River was to be the line of demarcation for future operations. Forbes received a 35 percent kickback on any VA hospital construction east of the Mississippi river, while Forbes, Mortimer, and Hurley divided construction west of the river in equal thirds. Construction west of the river alone amounted to over \$150,000 per conspirator per hospital.<sup>54</sup> In addition to the construction contracts, Forbes also controlled access to supplies and equipment to furnish the new hospitals.<sup>55</sup> Forbes began to sell off hospital furnishing items such as sheets, towels, clothing, etc. and even attempted to sell \$5 million dollars' worth of pharmaceuticals to druggists on the East coast.<sup>56</sup> U.S. Public Health Service Surgeon-General H.S. Cummings learned of the attempt and reported the illegal equipment sales to Harding. The President immediately summoned Forbes to the White House for an explanation, but Forbes lied and produced fake evidence of his innocence.<sup>57</sup> Undeterred by the Presidents inquiries, Forbes continued to sell the supplies at less than a quarter

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<sup>52</sup>Werner, *Privileged Characters*, 206.

<sup>53</sup>Hurley was a friend of Forbes, and long-time construction contractor who joined the trip in California.

<sup>54</sup>Werner, *Privileged Characters*, 207.

<sup>55</sup>Dean, *Warren G. Harding: The American Presidents Series*, 140.

<sup>56</sup>Werner, *Privileged Characters*, 207.

<sup>57</sup>Dean, *Warren G. Harding: The American Presidents Series*, 140.

of their value on the dollar.<sup>58</sup> Whatever Harding's faults with the numerous scandals of his administration, once he learned of Forbes illegal selling of supplies he immediately dispatched Army personnel to stop the shipments and summoned Forbes yet again to the White House to explain his actions in selling Veterans Bureau supplies. During this final meeting, Harding demanded Forbes' resignation. Mysteriously, Harding allowed Forbes to leave the White House without a formal resignation where Forbes, along with Mrs. Mortimer, fled to Europe where he officially resigned via telegraph in February of 1923.<sup>59</sup>

News of Forbes' flight to Europe, and his illegal activities, began to spread. The Disabled American Veterans (DAV) in October of 1922 first learned of Forbes corrupt deals and demanded a Congressional investigation.<sup>60</sup> The American Legion quickly followed the DAV in demanding an official query. Therefore in March 1923, the Senate responded to the multiple requests and began an investigation into Forbes' activities. One of the accused was Charles Cramer, friend and legal counsel of Forbes, who committed suicide in March 1923 to avoid the hearings.<sup>61</sup> Interestingly enough, the star witness of the hearings was none other than Charles Forbes' partner in crime Elisa Mortimer.<sup>62</sup> Mortimer was not pleased that Mrs. Mortimer had fled to Europe with Forbes and provided the Senate evidence of the California trip, construction kickbacks, and testimony that Forbes had received direct cash payments for advanced notice of construction

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<sup>58</sup>Werner, *Privileged Characters*, 218.

<sup>59</sup>Dean, *Warren G. Harding: The American Presidents Series*, 225.

<sup>60</sup>Werner, *Privileged Characters*, 225.

<sup>61</sup>*Ibid.*, 308.

<sup>62</sup>Dean, *Warren G. Harding: The American Presidents Series*, 141.

details.<sup>63</sup> The Senate hearings ended in the fall of 1923 and the results sent to the U.S. Justice Department for consideration. Justice chose to prosecute and on 21 March 1926, Charles R. Forbes began his new career as prisoner number 25021, serving a two-year sentence at the Federal Penitentiary in Leavenworth, KS (See Figure 8 in Appendix D).<sup>64</sup>

President Harding did not live to see either the Veterans Bureau scandal or the Tea Pot Dome scandal hearings. He succumbed to illness in August of 1923 while on a vacation to the West coast.<sup>65</sup> However, before his death, and in another of his interesting management choices, he selected a highly qualified person to begin restoring veterans' trust in the Veterans Bureau. He selected Brigadier General Frank T. Hines to clean up the Veterans Bureau, and overcome the scandalous administration of Charles R. Forbes (See Figure 9 in Appendix D).

#### HINES TO THE RESCUE

Frank T. Hines was born in Salt Lake City, Utah on 11 April 1879.<sup>66</sup> Trained as a civil engineer, Hines joined the Utah Volunteer Regiment to serve in the Spanish-American War. His Artillery Battery elected him Sergeant and Hines quickly became "Top" or First Sergeant of "B" Battery.<sup>67</sup> Hines served with distinction during the Battle of Manila in 1898 where his artillery proved instrumental in "dislodging the enemy from high ground."<sup>68</sup> Promoted to Second

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<sup>63</sup>Werner, *Privileged Characters*, 198.

<sup>64</sup>National Archives at Kansas City, *Name Index to Inmate Case Files, U.S. Penitentiary, Leavenworth, Kansas, 1895 – 1931* (Kansas City: Government Printing Office, 21 March 1926), 129.

<sup>65</sup>Dean, *Warren G. Harding: The American Presidents Series*, 152.

<sup>66</sup>A. Prentiss, *The History of the Utah Volunteers in the Spanish-American War and in the Philippine Islands* (Salt Lake City: W. F. Ford, 1900), 384.

<sup>67</sup>*Ibid.*, 384.

<sup>68</sup>*Ibid.*, 246.

Lieutenant, First Lieutenant, and Battalion Adjutant for his actions in the Philippines, he mustered out of the Utah Volunteers after the war in 1901 and joined the regular U.S. Army as a Second Lieutenant in the Coast Artillery.<sup>69</sup> Hines eventually held every rank in the Army from private to General during the time between the Spanish American War and World War I. His main contribution in World War I was not on the front but as Chief of Embarkation. As such, he planned troop shipments to Europe during the war. All totaled, the logistical requirements for sending nearly 2 million men “over there” was Hines’s responsibility. Furthermore, he also planned the return transport of all 2 million men after the war, and had them all home in only 8 months.<sup>70</sup> After the troops returned, Hines retired from active duty and became president of a steamship company.<sup>71</sup>

Shortly before his retirement from the Army Hines testified before Congress in 1919 about the reorganization of the Army and the establishment of a permanent Transportation Corps. He based his testimony on his knowledge of the many disparate units that were responsible for transporting men and material during the war.<sup>72</sup> Hines prepared well for the hearing. He had numerous tables of organization for the newly proposed Transportation Corp and candidly responded to questions about inefficiencies of the current Army transportation system and specific transportation failures during the war.<sup>73</sup> In testimony before Congress, Hines established

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<sup>69</sup>Ibid., 385.

<sup>70</sup>Brigadier General Frank T. Hines, “Transporting the American Army,” *New York Times*, 1 June 1919.

<sup>71</sup>Simmons-Boardman, *Marine Engineering/log*, vol. 25 (Simmons-Boardman Publishing Corporation, 1920), 780.

<sup>72</sup>U.S. Congress, *BG Times - Reorganization of the Army*, 233.

<sup>73</sup>Ibid., 246.

a reputation for honesty and frankness that became the cornerstone for his appointment as Veterans Bureau Director (See Figure 10 in Appendix D). Furthermore, he established a close working relationship with Congress that began to restore trust in his directorship.<sup>74</sup> He routinely testified on Bureau issues before committee hearings and even welcomed Congressional oversight.<sup>75</sup> Also, Hines wasted no time and cooperated fully with the Congressional oversight committee to expose Forbes's illegal activities.<sup>76</sup> He even reorganized the Bureau to mitigate the damage of Forbes by centralizing administration functions into three separate agencies: medical and rehabilitation (future VHA), claims, insurance, and finance (future VBA), supply, planning, and control (VA Central Office).<sup>77</sup> The reorganization created district offices throughout the country, many of which are still operational and providing modern service to veterans.

Unfortunately, during Hines administration of the bureau, the country plunged into the Great Depression and veterans services dramatically changed.<sup>78</sup> The stock market crash of 1929 devastated the financial community. By 1933, the entire nation was struggling to survive and federal budgets were slashed, to include the military and Veterans Bureau. In 1931, the Army budget was \$346,979,179. During the height of the depression, the budget reduced to 20 percent

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<sup>74</sup>Gladys Kammerer, "The Veterans Administration in Transition," *Public Administration Review* 8, no. 2 (1948): 103-109.

<sup>75</sup>Jesse T. Tarbert, "Scandal and Reform in Federal Veteran's Welfare Agencies: Building the Veterans' Administration, 1920-1932" (Master's thesis, Case Western Reserve University), 2011.

<sup>76</sup>*Ibid.*, 29.

<sup>77</sup>Tarbert, "Scandal and Reform in Federal Veteran's Welfare Agencies," 27.

<sup>78</sup>David E. Johnson, "From Frontier Constabulary to Modern Army: The U.S. Army between the World Wars," ed. Harold R. Winton, and David R. Mets, *The Challenge of Change Military Institutions and New Realities, 1918-1941* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2000), 178.

or \$277,066,381.<sup>79</sup> Future Veterans Administration Director, and General of the Army, Omar Bradley said “In those dark days, when almost every family in America was struggling to survive, and the possibility of war seemed as remote as the moon, money for a standing army seemed an absurd luxury.”<sup>80</sup> Veterans impacted by the Great Depression began to demand their bond payment, or “bonus”, for service during World War I. Shortly after the war, Congress voted to provide a bonus in the form of a bond that had a twenty-year maturity. Due to the depression, veterans wanted the bond cashed immediately to offset the effects of the financial crisis.<sup>81</sup> Unfortunately, Director Hines considered the bonus a payout rather than a benefit and did not support veteran’s claim to the bonus. Across the country, veterans began to organize.<sup>82</sup>

While the seeds of veterans’ discontent were germinating, newly elected President Herbert Hoover proposed further reorganizing and centralizing Veteran’s services into a single administration. In his 1929 State of the Union address, Mr. Hoover proposed consolidating the Veterans Bureau, the National Home for Veterans, and the Veterans Pension Bureau into a single organization.<sup>83</sup> Mr. Hoover was “convinced that we will gain in efficiency, economy, and more uniform administration” if “brought together under a single agency.”<sup>84</sup> On 21 July 1930, President

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<sup>79</sup>Ibid., 178.

<sup>80</sup>Omar N. Bradley and Clay Blair, *A General’s Life: An Autobiography by General of the Army Omar N. Bradley* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1983), 440.

<sup>81</sup>Department of Veterans Affairs, *VA History in Brief* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2008), 5.

<sup>82</sup>William D. Mitchell, “Report on Bonus March,” FBI Report (Washington, DC: Federal Bureau of Investigation, 1932).

<sup>83</sup>Herbert Hoover, *State of the Union Address* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1929).

<sup>84</sup>Ibid.

Hoover signed Executive Order 5398 creating the administration that served veterans for the next 58 years.<sup>85</sup> Unfortunately, the Great Depression, and the 20 year veterans bond, tested the new administration and Director Hines.

### THE BONUS ARMY

In May 1932, with the economy decimated, veterans started to vehemently demand the bonus for their service in World War 1. Across the country veterans began to apply political pressure to amend the original bond act and immediately grant the \$1,500 bonus. Reacting to veteran pressure, the House of Representative passed an amendment to cash out the bond. The Senate scheduled a vote to ratify the amendment on July 17.<sup>86</sup> Meanwhile, veterans across the country started moving to Washington DC in anticipation of the Senate vote.<sup>87</sup> Word quickly spread and more veterans started moving towards the Capitol to support the legislation. The veteran marchers initially settled under the Anacostia Bridge near the Washington Navy Yard. By June 1932, their numbers swelled beyond Anacostia and the many of the marchers moved to the Capitol Mall and nearby abandoned buildings (See Figure 11 in Appendix D).<sup>88</sup> However, not all of the marchers were veterans. The Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) estimated approximately one-quarter of the marchers were members of the Communist Party or criminal elements.<sup>89</sup> In his memoirs, then Army Chief of Staff General Douglas MacArthur was convinced

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<sup>85</sup>Herbert Hoover, "Executive Order 5398—Establishing the Veterans' Administration" *The American Presidency Project* (21 July 1930), <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=75311> (accessed 3 April 2014).

<sup>86</sup>Department of Veterans Affairs, *VA History in Brief*, 9.

<sup>87</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>88</sup>Mitchell, "Report on Bonus March," 5.

<sup>89</sup>*Ibid.*, 7.

the marchers were so subversive the government itself was in peril.<sup>90</sup> According to the FBI, the bonus army population swelled to as many as 15,000.<sup>91</sup> However, after the Senate failed to ratify the bonus act on 17 July 1932, many of the marchers peacefully left the Capitol and returned to their homes. Approximately 4,000 marchers refused to leave and remained camped on the Mall and under the Anacostia Bridge.<sup>92</sup> The D.C. Commissioners reached their culmination point and on 28 July 1932 ordered the Capitol Police to clear out the marchers. They were met with stiff resistance and pushed out of the bonus army camp. L. H. Reichelderfer, President of the Board of Commissioners of the District of Columbia, requested emergency assistance from President Hoover.<sup>93</sup>

Hoover wasted no time and ordered Secretary of War Patrick J. Hurley to immediately request General MacArthur send troops to remove the marchers.<sup>94</sup> MacArthur took the order seriously, and in full uniform, accompanied by his aide Major Dwight D. Eisenhower, led the Army response (See Figure 13 in Appendix D). MacArthur ordered the 3rd Cavalry, under the command of Executive Officer Major George S. Patton, to assist the Capitol Police. Patton personally rode into the Capitol with cavalry troopers brandishing sabers and spurs.<sup>95</sup> The Army

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<sup>90</sup>Douglas MacArthur, *Reminiscences* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2001), 74.

<sup>91</sup>Mitchell, "Report on Bonus March," 5.

<sup>92</sup>Mitchell, "Report on Bonus March," 10.

<sup>93</sup>L. H. Reichelderfer, "Letter to President Hoover from L. H. Reichelderfer," President of the Board of Commissioners of the District of Columbia, requesting federal assistance, 28 July 1932 (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1932).

<sup>94</sup>Patrick J. Hurley, "Order to General MacArthur from Patrick J. Hurley," Secretary of War, 28 July 1932 (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1932).

<sup>95</sup>Stanley Weintraub, *15 Stars: Eisenhower, MacArthur, Marshall: Three Generals Who Saved the American Century* (New York: New American Library, 2007), 82-83.

quickly forced the bonus marchers out of the Capitol and their camp in Anacostia (See Figure 12 in Appendix D). Afterwards, General MacArthur held an impromptu press conference and commended President Hoover for his patience in dealing with the marchers and his decision to disperse the rioters. MacArthur stated “it would have been a very sad day for the country tomorrow” had the President not acted.<sup>96</sup> The press was not as enthusiastic as General MacArthur was about the treatment of the veterans and papers across the country cried foul.<sup>97</sup> Although, not a participant in the forceful eviction of the marchers, General Hines did harm the goodwill he had built in the Bureau and Administration over the previous eight years by testifying before Congress and writing letters to newspapers in opposition of the bonus.<sup>98</sup> Congress was more forgiving and recognized the public perception of the Army’s use of force on veterans. They voted to provide a per diem of 75 cents per day and travel expenses so the veterans could return home. Over five thousand veterans applied for the per diem, amounting to over \$76 thousand dollars.<sup>99</sup> Finally, in 1936, four years after the Bonus March, Congress voted to provide an early bond payment for the veterans.<sup>100</sup>

On 7 December 1941, the troubled relationship between veterans, Veterans Bureau, and the government, due to the Charles Forbes scandals and Bonus March ended when the Japanese attacked the U.S. naval base at Pearl Harbor and the island of Oahu, Hawaii.<sup>101</sup> Although not

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<sup>96</sup>Douglas MacArthur, “Statement to Press on July 28, 1932” (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1932).

<sup>97</sup>New York Times, “ANACOSTIA CAMP NO MORE,” *New York Times*, 29 July 1932.

<sup>98</sup>Cornell Daily Sun, “ARMY OFFICIAL OPPOSES BONUS Frank T. Hines Declares Expenditures Equal to Financing Another War,” *Cornell Daily Sun*, 27 April 1932.

<sup>99</sup>Department of Veterans Affairs, *VA History in Brief*, 10.

<sup>100</sup>*Ibid.*, 10.

<sup>101</sup>Franklin D. Roosevelt, *Proposed Message to Congress* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1941).

apparent in 1941, Allied successes by 1944 clearly indicated an Axis defeat. Strategic planners were already preparing options to support veterans in the post-World War II era. The result of the planning created the Servicemen's Readjustment Act, more commonly known as the G.I. Bill that became one of the most positive transforming forces for DVA.

### THE G. I. BILL

By June 1944, the Allies had started gaining momentum on the Axis forces on all fronts. In the European Theater, the Allies had landed on the beaches of Normandy and penetrated "Fortress Europe." In the Mediterranean Theater, the Allies had entered the Italian capitol of Rome. In the Pacific, the Allies had landed on Saipan and decisively defeated the Japanese Navy in the Battle of the Philippine Sea, and in the China Burma India Theater the monsoon season had ended and the Allies were poised to regain Burma. Clearly, the Axis powers were on the defensive and U.S. officials had started planning post-war issues.<sup>102</sup> Interestingly enough, and in a throwback to Veterans Bureau Director R.G. Cholmeley-Jones work with the American Legion to establish a cooperative environment for veterans, it was an American Legion member, and not Congress or the VA, who first recognized the issue of 16 million service members returning home from war. Harry W. Colmery, a World War I Veteran and American Legion past Commander, penned the first draft of the G. I. Bill in a Washington, D.C. hotel room in 1944.<sup>103</sup> In his testimony before Congress, Colmery presented a comprehensive list of changes to the Veterans Administrations such as centralizing the authority for executing the G.I. Bill with the Administration Director. The Act also authorized \$500,000,000 to build new hospitals for the

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<sup>102</sup>Millett, Maslowski, and Feis, *For The Common Defense*, 409.

<sup>103</sup>Harry W. Colmery, *The Harry W. Colmery Collection* (Kansas City: Kansas State Historical Society, c.a. 1911—c.a. 1979, bulk c.a. 1925—c.a. 1965), 5.

returning troops and required the Army and Navy to allow VA personnel access to military facilities to assist with the transition from active duty.<sup>104</sup>

The changes the Act made to the Veterans Administration were significant, yet it is the Bill's educational opportunities that is most known. In his testimony before Congress, Mr. Colmery was clear that this was not a handout for veterans, but "a square deal" for time away from their civilian career.<sup>105</sup> In fact, the requirements were very specific: veterans must use the educational provisions within two years after discharge and all benefits expired after 7 years.<sup>106</sup> Congress passed the act and President Franklin Roosevelt signed the G.I. Bill into law on 22 June 1944.<sup>107</sup> Of the 15.4 million service members of World War II, over 7 million veterans utilized the Bill.<sup>108</sup> Less than five years later, the program expanded to include Korean War veterans. Of the 13.4 million eligible Korean War veterans, over 8 million utilized the Bill.<sup>109</sup>

While the G. I. Bill addressed returning veterans, President Roosevelt's successor, Harry S. Truman wanted to address the Veterans Administration. As stated before, Frank T. Hines had done an admirable job of restoring honesty to the VA. Even with his opposition to the Bonus Army, Hines was a respected organizer and administrator. However, by 1945 Hines had been in the position for over twenty years and President Truman wanted to change the entire

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<sup>104</sup>U.S. Congress, Public Law 346, 68th Cong., 2nd sess., 1944 (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1944), 2.

<sup>105</sup>Harry W. Colmery, *Hearing before Congress on the Serviceman's Readjustment Act* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1944), 4.

<sup>106</sup>*Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>107</sup>U.S. Congress, Public Law 346, 2.

<sup>108</sup>Cassandra Dortch, *GI Bills Enacted Prior to 2008 and Related Veterans' Educational Assistance Programs: A Primer* (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 2012), 38.

<sup>109</sup>*Ibid.*, 33.

organization. Mr. Truman also knew the person for the job was General Omar N. Bradley. Even though President Truman reminded the press of his commitment to modernize the VA, the selection of Bradley came as a surprise to the reporters.<sup>110</sup>

### OMAR BRADLEY

The press may have been surprised, but General Bradley was “devastated” by the news. Bradley considered himself a fighting general and knew little of the Veterans Administration, but Truman handpicked Bradley for the job because he was “an outstanding Army figure.”<sup>111</sup> Army Chief of Staff General George C. Marshall told Bradley this was a “career enhancing” move and not a detriment to his Army status, but Bradley was not convinced. General Marshall, in a foreshadowing of the future, predicted Bradley will do a “superb job in a difficult position” and that it was only be for a “year or two.”<sup>112</sup> Bradley was reluctant to take a Washington desk job because the war with Japan was still raging in the Pacific. In fact, General Dwight Eisenhower informed Bradley of President Truman’s decision about the VA only two weeks after the German surrender in Europe.<sup>113</sup>

The second director of the Veterans Administration was a career soldier, and perhaps one of the best-known generals of World War II (See Figure 14 in Appendix D). It is not surprising Truman picked Bradley to head the VA. Like Truman, Bradley was born and raised in rural Missouri. At an early age, Bradley learned to love to read and scored well in school. Encouraged

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<sup>110</sup>Harry S. Truman, “The President's News Conference” (Washington, DC: The White House, 1945).

<sup>111</sup>Bradley and Blair, *A General's Life*, 68.

<sup>112</sup>Ibid.

<sup>113</sup>Michael D. Gambon, *The Greatest Generation Comes Home: The Veteran in American Society* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2005), 33.

by mentors, he scored second highest on the West Point entrance exam, and was selected after the first place contender could not attend.<sup>114</sup> He graduated from West Point in what historians have named “the class the stars fell upon”<sup>115</sup> and took up post on the U.S. Mexican border during the Punitive Expedition against Pancho Villa.<sup>116</sup> He served with distinction in both world wars and was just the kind of person President Truman was looking for to re-energize the department.

General Bradley (he maintained his Army status during his VA tenure), wasted no time in making changes.<sup>117</sup> One of his first acts was to bring in his Army operational staff from the 12th Army Group.<sup>118</sup> Bradley recognized VA planning was lacking and counted on his staff to move the VA forward. General Hines had done an admirable job over the previous 20 years to restore the trust in the VA caused by the Forbes scandals, but he was not an innovative man. As Bradley eloquently phrased it “When we came in we found it impossible to pile the huge load of World War II on a chassis built for World War I.”<sup>119</sup> The return of 16 million veterans (four times the number of World War I veterans) was the driving force for change.

By the end of the war, the VA was receiving one quarter of a million pieces of mail per day. Unable to keep up, the VA was soon subject to criticism from the public.<sup>120</sup> Bradley took steps to address the issue by immediately decentralizing the administration and requiring the

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<sup>114</sup>Bradley and Blair, *A General's Life*, 68.

<sup>115</sup>36 percent of the 1915 class attained general officer rank.

<sup>116</sup>Bradley and Blair, *A General's Life*, 39.

<sup>117</sup>Truman, “The President's News Conference.”

<sup>118</sup>Bradley and Blair, *A General's Life*, 440.

<sup>119</sup>Gambon, *The Greatest Generation Comes Home*, 34.

<sup>120</sup>Bradley and Blair, *A General's Life*, 450.

thirteen regional directors to address veteran's issues in their areas. Furthermore, he held each regional director accountable for the issues in his/her region while he focused on making certain the regional directors had the resources needed for success. The planning staff he pulled from the 12th Army Group proved instrumental in reshaping the VA to serve returning veterans.<sup>121</sup>

Much like General Hines, General Bradley was keenly aware of public perception. He routinely appeared on radio addresses and made an effort to inform the public on VA's efforts to serve veterans. One of his more intriguing ventures was his full support of the movie *The Best Years of Our Lives*.<sup>122</sup> The film was a box office success and resulted in movie mogul Samuel Goldwyn famously stating, "I don't care if the film doesn't make a nickel. I just want every man, woman, and child in America to see it."<sup>123</sup> The movie was remarkable for the frank portrayal of veterans returning home from the war and the issues they faced. A non-actor, Sergeant Harold Russell, played one of the leading characters. Russell was an Army training instructor with the 13th Airborne Division and on June 6, 1944, lost both hands in a training accident.<sup>124</sup> He was fitted with prosthetic hooks and discharged from the Army before his discovery by movie director William Wyler, who had served in the Army Air Force during World War II.<sup>125</sup> To this day Sergeant Russell is the only person in Oscar history to win two awards for the same performance. The Oscar committee wanted to recognize Russell's performance, whether he won or not, and awarded him an honorary Oscar for "bringing hope and courage to his fellow veterans." Russell's

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<sup>121</sup>Gambon, *The Greatest Generation Comes Home*, 35.

<sup>122</sup>Gambon, *The Greatest Generation Comes Home*, 154.

<sup>123</sup>Roger Ebert, "The Great Movies," (29 December 2007), <http://www.rogerebert.com/reviews/the-best-years-of-our-lives-1946> (accessed 2 March 2014).

<sup>124</sup>Gambon, *The Greatest Generation Comes Home*, 154.

<sup>125</sup>*Ibid.*

performance was excellent and he won a real Oscar for best supporting actor and secured his place in movie history.<sup>126</sup> The movie was a commercial success, and in line with Samuel Goldwyn's desires, General Bradley made the movie "required viewing for all VA personnel."<sup>127</sup>

Bradley did much to enhance the efficiency and reputation of VA. He regularly appeared on radio and film and was the first director to welcome Hollywood in communicating Veteran's issues. His staff reorganized internal processes such as mail claim service to reduce central office backlogs. He also increased the responsibility of regional directors across the country and held them accountable for their actions in managing local veteran's issues. Finally, as a respected combat general, he brought a sense of importance to the directorship. However, Bradley's tenure as Director ended in 1948 when, true to his word, General George C. Marshall fulfilled his promise to Bradley by recommending him for the Chief of Staff position. Bradley succeeded General Marshall in 1948, and in 1949 become the first Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.<sup>128</sup>

#### EXECUTIVE OFFICE REORGANIZATION

President Truman's appointment of General Bradley was an example of how a change in leadership affected the VA, and the G. I. Bill was an example of legislative action that changed the VA. The 1947 Executive Agency Reorganization is an example of how presidentially mandated organizational changes have shaped DVA. The Executive Agency Reorganization was not limited to the Veterans Administration, but encompassed all executive departments and agencies.<sup>129</sup> President Truman wanted a respected person to lead the committee and asked former

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<sup>126</sup>IMDB, *Internet Movie Database* (22 February 2005), [http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0036868/trivia?ref\\_=tt\\_trv\\_trv](http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0036868/trivia?ref_=tt_trv_trv) (accessed 2 March 2014).

<sup>127</sup>Gambon, *The Greatest Generation Comes Home*, 154.

<sup>128</sup>Bradley and Blair, *A General's Life*, 494.

<sup>129</sup>William E. Pemberton, "Truman and the Hoover Commission," *Whistle Stop* 19, no.3 (1991).

President Herbert Hoover to head the review. Mr. Hoover, a Republican, may have seemed an unusual choice for a Democratic President, but he was a respected organizer and administrator. The Great Depression may have tarnished his reputation, but President Truman recognized Hoover's abilities and needed his skills to develop the recommendations. The examination, also known as the Hoover Commission, was sweeping in scope. The resulting changes shaped the VA, and most federal agencies, into what we know today.

The Hoover Commission final report recommended many changes for the organization and started with VA leadership. Up until this point, the regional directors were deputies to the director and each regional directorate was a separate entity. The commission recommended adding a Deputy Director for the VA and no fewer than three Assistant Administrators. The regional directors reorganized under the Assistant Administrators streamlining the VA Director's duties.<sup>130</sup> Furthermore, the commission recommended creating additional agencies to manage veterans services. Among them was the Office of General Counsel to manage legal issues, the Office of Information to ensure veterans received pertinent information, and centralization of all management functions under the Office of Administration.<sup>131</sup> This was the last major organizational change to the department before ascension to cabinet level (see figure 1 and 2 in Appendix A). The commission's recommendations successfully streamlined many VA operations. In fact, the commission was so successful that President Eisenhower commissioned a second study. This commission, known as "Little Hoover" was not as sweeping as the previous report and the VA was not included.

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<sup>130</sup>Recommendations of Commission on Organization of the Executive Branch of the Government (Hoover Commission). Providing for Reorganization of the Veterans' Administration and Creating a Veterans' Insurance Corporation.

<sup>131</sup>Ibid.

## THE FINAL LEGISLATIVE CHANGES

The last quarter of the twentieth Century saw sweeping changes to the Veterans Administration. Among the major actions was the creation of the National Cemetery Administration within the Veterans Administration. National military cemeteries were not under a single department and were administered across several agencies. The Army, VA, and the Department of Interior managed veteran cemeteries, while the National Park Service managed the property if the cemetery was located on a military battlefield. Each department set their own standards and rules for burial. In 1950, the Army halted the creation of new cemeteries and established new burial requirements for its cemeteries.<sup>132</sup> The result of limiting the number of cemeteries became an unplanned system shock during the height of the Vietnam War. Recognizing the unfortunate need for new cemeteries, President Lyndon B. Johnson ordered a comprehensive review of the nation's cemetery system.<sup>133</sup> The resulting report recommended three major changes: the Army should transfer all military cemetery functions to the VA, the VA should make burial services convenient for the families of veterans, and the VA should standardize burial practices across the country.<sup>134</sup> It took another six years, but the National Cemeteries Act of 1973 solidified most of the recommendations. However the Army maintained control of Arlington National Cemetery and the Soldiers and Airman National Home Cemetery, while the Department of Interior continued to manage national battlefield cemeteries.<sup>135</sup> This

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<sup>132</sup>Communications and Outreach Support Division, *History and Development of the National Cemeteries Administration*, Department of Veterans Affairs, National Cemeteries Administration (14 February 2014):8, <http://www.cem.va.gov/cem/docs/factsheets/history.pdf> (accessed 9 March 2014).

<sup>133</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>134</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>135</sup>Department of Veterans Affairs, *VA History in Brief*, 22.

legislative action completed the functional reorganization of veterans services into a single administration, but significant departmental changes remained.

The period after Vietnam was a tumultuous time for the VA and DOD. The move away from conscription to a volunteer force required new strategies for both DOD and VA. From the DOD perspective there must be an incentive to join the military, while the VA had to make adjustments in planning for future Veteran requirements. DOD relied on the Volunteer Educational Assistance Policy (VEAP) as a recruitment incentive. However, only 20 percent of new recruits participated in the program. By the early 1980s, legislatures considered options to increase Army recruiting. One piece of legislative incentive was the creation of a new G.I. Bill. The original G.I. Bill provided benefits for actual wartime service. The new Montgomery G.I. Bill eliminated the wartime requirement, greatly increasing the number of service members eligible for benefits, and provided educational incentives to join the military. The Montgomery addendum, and the Post 911 updates to the G.I. Bill, resulted in over 700,000 veterans utilizing the educational opportunities of the Bill.<sup>136</sup>

The VA also faced other modern social issues stemming from divorce and child support payments. In the 1987 Supreme Court case of *Rose v. Rose*, the defendant, a fully disabled Veteran, had no issue providing child support payments, but was prohibited from creating an automatic allotment from his VA disability payment. The divorce settlement was awarded by a state and the VA's position, along with other government agencies, was a federal payment was not subject to state control. The Supreme Court ruled in favor of the allotment based on individual mandate; the individual, and not a federal agency, was responsible for dispersing VA disability payments, therefore a federal agency could not deny or approve allotment requests.<sup>137</sup>

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<sup>136</sup>Dortch, *GI Bills Enacted Prior to 2008*, 10.

<sup>137</sup>U.S. Supreme Court, *Rose v. Rose*, 481 U.S. 619 (1987).

Rose v. Rose simply illustrated the types of changes that needed to take place at the VA in managing modern veteran benefits. The ruling helped set the stage for the final major organizational shaping force of the administration. The change occurred on 25 October 1988 with the creation of the Department of Veterans Affairs.<sup>138</sup> The act elevated the new department to a cabinet level agency, created the VA Secretary position, and elevated the Director of NCA to Under Secretary.<sup>139</sup> The department is now the second largest agency in the government, and with the creation of the Department of Homeland Security in 2002, no longer the last department in the line of succession.<sup>140</sup>

### THE MODERN VA

The past 25 years have been transformative for DVA and Information Technology (IT) has played an important part of the transformation. In fact, the financial scandals of Charles Forbes rocked the faith of veterans in the old bureau, the loss of a single VA laptop computer in 2005 damaged the faith of veterans in the new agency. By 2005, former VA Secretary James R. Nicholson recognized the need to make significant changes in IT. There was no central IT budget and each VA Medical Center (VAMC) managed the purchase, acquisition, and maintenance of IT.<sup>141</sup> DVA had 152 VAMC's across the country, each with their own IT goals and budgets. VA commissioned IBM to study IT across the agency and provide an improvement plan. The report

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<sup>138</sup>Jack B. Brooks, *Public Law No: 100-527, Department of Veterans Affairs Act* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1988).

<sup>139</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>140</sup>Richard K. Arme, *Public Law No: 107-296. Homeland Security Act of 2002* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2002).

<sup>141</sup>Jonathan Walters, *Transforming Information* (Washington, DC: IBM, 2005).

recommended thirty-six core process to transform the organization.<sup>142</sup> Unfortunately, before the changes began, a criminal illegally entered a DVA employee's home and removed a government laptop containing more than 26 million veterans' records including approximately 19 million Social Security Numbers.<sup>143</sup> Although authorities recovered the laptop, and no veterans' data was missing, Congress, the press, public, and VSOs seriously doubted DVA's IT security capability.<sup>144</sup> Veterans across the country questioned the VA's ability to secure their data and Congress and DVA acted quickly to pass legislation to enact the changes recommended in the IBM report.<sup>145</sup> Specifically, the report recommended two major changes: the creation of a Chief Information Officer (CIO) at the Assistant Secretary level and the centralization of over 7,500 IT personnel under the CIO.<sup>146</sup>

Centralized IT required centralized planning, and new Assistant Secretary and CIO Roger Baker, instituted a platform called the Program Management and Accountability System (PMAS).<sup>147</sup> The main purpose of PMAS was to achieve "a project's stated incremental

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<sup>142</sup>Jonathan Walters, *Transforming Information* (Washington, DC: IBM, 2005).

<sup>143</sup>U.S. Congress, House, *The Honorable James R. Nicholson, Secretary of Veterans Affairs Before the House Veterans Affairs Committee*, Congressional Report (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2005).

<sup>144</sup>*Ibid.*.

<sup>145</sup>U.S. Congress, House, *Department of Veterans Affairs Information Technology Management Improvement Act of 2005*, H.R. 4061 (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2005).

<sup>146</sup>Walters, *Transforming Information*.

<sup>147</sup>Roger W. Baker, *Witness Testimony of Hon. Roger W. Baker, Assistant Secretary for Information and Technology and Chief Information Officer, U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs*, Congressional Report (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2014).

deliverable on-time.”<sup>148</sup> PMAS standardized DVA IT projects by tracking them to completion thorough pre-budget planning and by establishing incremental milestones to ensure project completion. Each IT project now requires an Integrated Project Team (IPT) to plan the project from start to finish, and a dashboard tracks project’s status in real time. To date, this program has saved veterans over \$200 million.<sup>149</sup> While PMAS was a success, other programs were not so successful.

In 2009, DVA and DOD announced the creation of the Virtual Lifetime Electronic Record (VLER) to help transition from active duty to Veteran. VLER was an attempt at interagency cooperation at the cabinet level. VLER enabled “the Department of Veterans Affairs and its partners to proactively provide the full continuum of services and benefits to veterans through Veteran-centric processes made possible by effective, efficient, and secure standards-based information sharing.”<sup>150</sup> VLER was supposed to integrate Department of Defense (DOD) and DVA computer systems to share data and ease the transition from active duty to Veteran. VLER also planned a "single source" of information for everything from health-care to cemetery services.<sup>151</sup> The importance of the program was emphasized by President Obama in a speech before DOD and DVA employees: “When a member of the Armed Forces separates from the military, he or she will no longer have to walk paperwork from a DOD duty station to a local VA health center; their electronic records will transition along with them and remain with them

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<sup>148</sup>Ibid.

<sup>149</sup>Ibid.

<sup>150</sup>Virtual Lifetime Achievement Record (2 May 2011), <http://www.va.gov/VLER/> (accessed 22 November 2013).

<sup>151</sup>Ibid.

forever.”<sup>152</sup> Unfortunately, VLER was not a success because DOD and DVA could not adapt their information systems, but it was an effort at strategic planning for the DVA.<sup>153</sup>

The DVA and DOD speak a common language, so it is logical to increase the sharing of information. One way DVA has recently embraced the common language is participation in military senior service training initiatives, such as the Army Leadership Centers of Excellence. The Command and General Staff College (CGSC), the School of Advanced Military Studies (SAMS), and the Army War College are examples of DVA and DOD education opportunities. DVA professionals can also apply to attend the U.S. Air Force Air War College, U.S. Navy Post Graduate School, the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy Fellowship, or the National Defense University. Participation in these military academic programs help DVA integrate with DOD on a professional basis and provide valuable educational opportunities for future leaders of DVA.<sup>154</sup> Graduates of these programs “help drive important change at VA as we strive to address evolving organizational and policy level issues to help us better meet the needs of veterans and their families.”<sup>155</sup>

The final internal shaping force of the DVA has been Secretary Eric Shinseki’s 21st Century VA initiative (See Figure 15 in Appendix D). In 2008, President Obama nominated

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<sup>152</sup>Jesse Lee, *A 21st Century Department of Veterans Affairs* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2009).

<sup>153</sup>Governemnt Accounting Office, “Statement of Joel C. Willemsen,” Testimony before the Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations, Committee on Veterans' Affairs, U.S. House of Representatives (Washington, DC: Governement Accounting Office, 2011).

<sup>154</sup>“The Career Advisor,” *VA Learning University eNewsletter* 3 (April 2013): 1.

<sup>155</sup>Dena Papazoglou, “Corporate Employee Development Board,” *Veterans Affairs Learning University* (17 October 2012): 1-3.

retired General Shinseki for the position.<sup>156</sup> Secretary Shinseki took office with a purpose to modernize the DVA, but as this monograph has demonstrated, the Executive Department continued to be deeply involved. In March 2009, President Barack Obama and Secretary Shinseki announced the transformation initiatives goals.<sup>157</sup> In an open letter to the Washington state veterans, Shinseki initially outlined his plan by ordering a comprehensive review of the department, stating, “We approach that review understanding that veterans are central to everything VA does. We know that results count, that the department will be measured by what we do, not what we promise.” Because of the review, Secretary Shinseki established sixteen agency-wide priorities as part of the 21st Century program (see Appendix B).<sup>158</sup> Work remains on the initiatives, especially eliminating veteran homelessness and the claims backlog, but identifying these issues as priorities has focused resources and created a new transparency for DVA.

## CONCLUSION

Forged in battle, molded by scandal, and shaped by statute, the modern Department of Veterans Affairs is the result of reaction to critical events. Certainly, war and its aftermath created the most dramatic need for a veteran’s service, and the U.S. Civil War, World War I, and World War II changed the volume of service delivery. For instance, the need for Veteran cemeteries after the Civil War created what is now the National Cemetery Administration. The sheer number of returning troops from Europe after World War I resulted in a centralized bureau to manage

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<sup>156</sup>Office of Public and Intergovernmental Affairs, *Executive Biographies*, Eric K. Shinseki (14 July 2010), [http://www.va.gov/opa/bios/bio\\_shinseki.asp](http://www.va.gov/opa/bios/bio_shinseki.asp) (accessed 24 February 2014).

<sup>157</sup>Lee, *A 21st Century Department of Veterans Affairs*.

<sup>158</sup>See Appendix B for a list of the 16 Initiatives

services. The end of World War II prompted the creation of a system that has educated millions of veterans.

Although the wars and scandal were major forces in creating the DVA, congressional legislation resulted in the majority of evolutionary changes to the agency. While the majority of legislation proved to be reaction to events, two acts were well planned and executed. The G.I. Bill and the executive branch reorganization during the Truman administration are examples of how strategic planning for the agency can produce sweeping, lasting, and positive changes.

Interestingly enough, the smallest shaping forces have been internal to the DVA. While it is true that General Hines, General Omar Bradley, and General Shinseki have internally shaped the agency, these changes were generally in reaction to an urgent need and external pressure. For General Hines it was to save the Bureau from scandals and restore trust. General Bradley's organizational skills and leadership ability guided the administration after World War II and during the Executive Branch re-organization. General Shinseki recognized the urgent need to change the DVA before it became irrelevant. It is clear there is a need to increase strategic planning for the organization to avoid reactionary changes. Internal changes should be the largest shaping force rather than the smallest.

Finally, the agency should collaborate with veterans service organizations to identify and plan for veterans care. There have at times been an adversarial relationship between DVA and VSOs. This should not exist because the VSOs were instrumental in creating the agency. The Bureau's first Director recognized the value of VSOs but his sudden death set back the effort. History has clouded the relationship, but recently DVA has recognized the need for partnership rather than partisanship. In an effort to establish transparent and open relationships, senior DVA leaders attend most VSO national conferences and community events across the country. DVA must continue to increase these efforts and plan strategically for change rather than reacting to

change. In a time of shrinking budgets, we must work together to provide VA's core values of "Integrity, Commitment, Advocacy, Respect, and Excellence" to our honored veterans.<sup>159</sup>

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<sup>159</sup>ICARE, "Integrity, Commitment, Advocacy, Respect, and Excellence" are DVA's core values.

## APPENDIX A

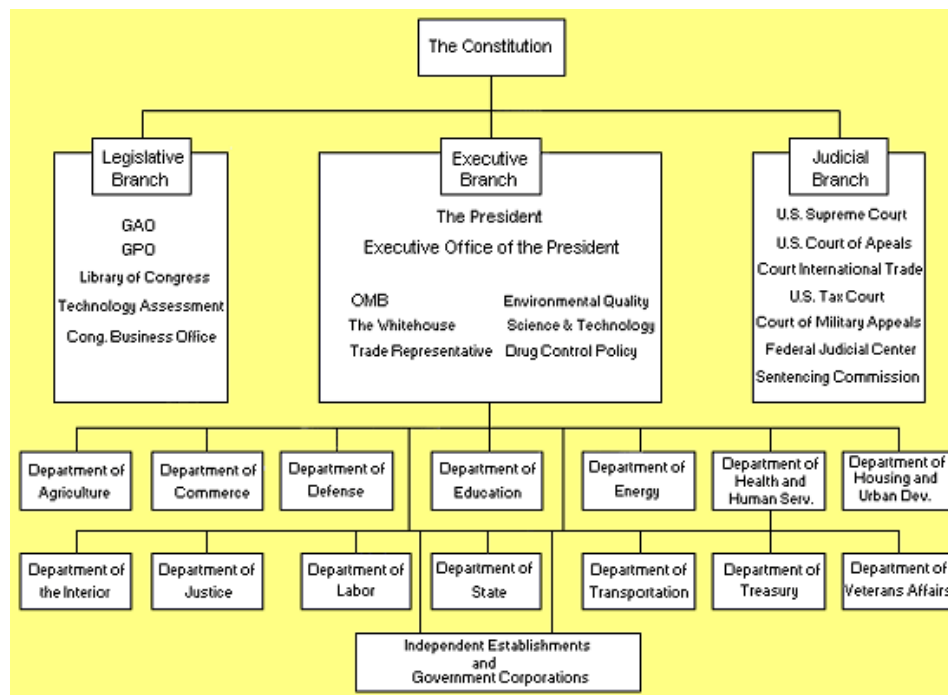
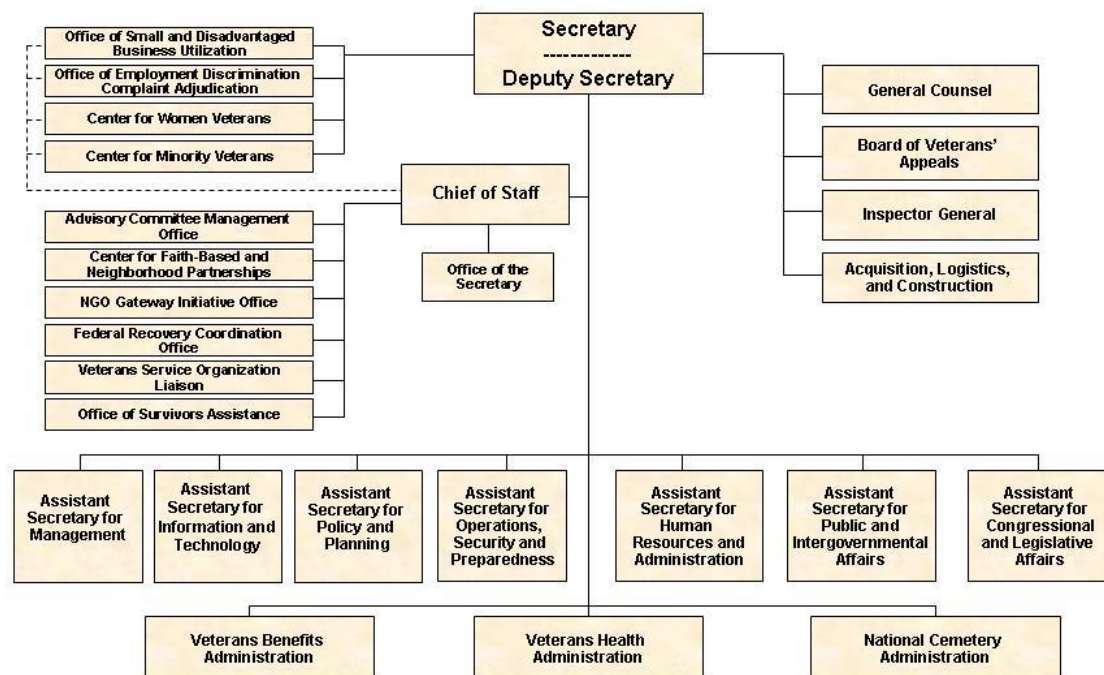


Figure 1. Department of Veterans Affairs after becoming a Cabinet level department in 1988

Source: Department of Veterans Affairs

# DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS



June 2009

Figure 2. Current Department of Veterans Affairs Organization Chart

Source: Department of Veterans Affairs

## APPENDIX B

### Secretary Eric Shinseki's 16 initiatives

- Eliminate Veteran homelessness.
- Enable 21st century benefits delivery and services.
- Automate GI Bill benefits.
- Create Virtual Lifetime Electronic Record by 2012.
- Improve veterans' mental health.
- Build VRM capability to enable convenient, seamless interactions.
- Design a Veteran-centric health care model to help veterans navigate the health care delivery system and receive coordinated care.
- Enhance the Veteran experience and access to health care.
- Ensure preparedness to meet emergent national needs.
- Develop capabilities and enabling systems to drive performance and outcomes.
- Establish strong VA management infrastructure and integrated operating model.
- Transform human capital management.
- Perform research and development to enhance the long-term health and well-being of veterans.
- Optimize the utilization of VA's Capital Portfolio by implementing and executing the Strategic Capital Investment Planning (SCIP) process.
- Health Care Efficiency: Improve the quality of health care while reducing cost.
- Transform health care delivery through health informatics.

## APPENDIX C

### The Gettysburg Address

“Four score and seven years ago our fathers brought forth on this continent, a new nation, conceived in Liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal.

Now we are engaged in a great civil war, testing whether that nation, or any nation so conceived and so dedicated, can long endure. We are met on a great battlefield of that war. We have come to dedicate a portion of that field, as a final resting place for those who here gave their lives that that nation might live. It is altogether fitting and proper that we should do this.

But, in a larger sense, we cannot dedicate—we cannot consecrate—we cannot hallow—this ground. The brave men, living and dead, who struggled here, have consecrated it, far above our poor power to add or detract. The world will little note, nor long remember what we say here, but it can never forget what they did here. It is for us the living, rather, to be dedicated here to the unfinished work which they who fought here have thus far so nobly advanced. It is rather for us to be here dedicated to the great task remaining before us—that from these honored dead we take increased devotion to that cause for which they gave the last full measure of devotion—that we here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain—that this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom—and that government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth.”<sup>160</sup>

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<sup>160</sup>Ward, Burns, and Burns, *The Civil War*, 236.

APPENDIX D



Figure 3. R. G. Cholmeley-Jones, Director of the War Risk Bureau, eating lunch at his desk

Source: Library of Congress



Figure 4. Director Charles R. Forbes, U.S. Veterans Bureau

Source: Library of Congress



Figure 5. Director Charles R. Forbes, U.S. Veterans Bureau holding a conference with his staff

Source: Library of Congress



Figure 6. Mrs. Elias H. Mortimer 04/04/24 mistress of Charles Forbes

Source: Library of Congress



Figure 7. Mr. Elias H. Mortimer 11/26/23

Source: Library of Congress



Figure 8. U.S. Federal Penitentiary at Leavenworth, KS

Source: Library of Congress



Figure 9. President Harding and General Frank T. Hines

Source: Library of Congress



Figure 10. General Frank T. Hines, 5/20/24

Source: Library of Congress



Figure 11. Bonus Army Camp, Anacostia, Washington, DC

Source: Library of Congress

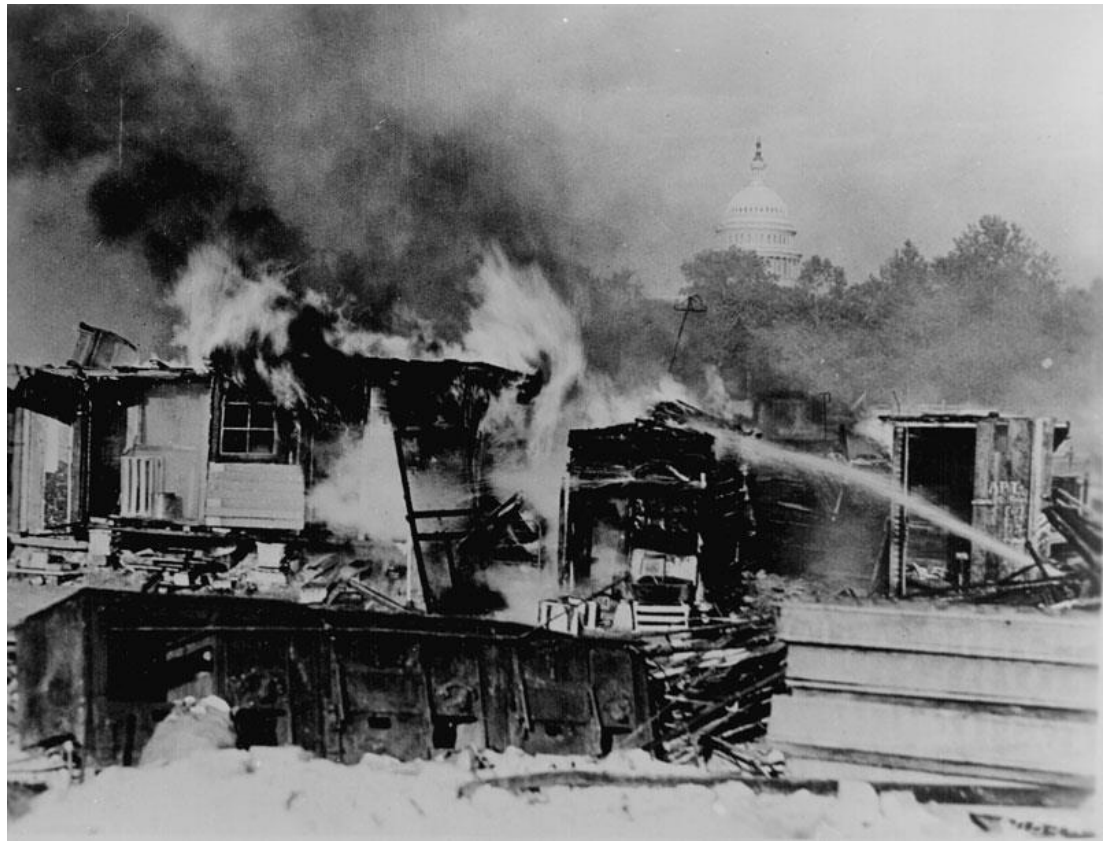


Figure 12. During the Army intervention

Source: Library of Congress



Figure 13. GEN Douglas MacArthur and MAJ Dwight Eisenhower

Source: Library of Congress



Figure 14. General Omar N. Bradley, second Director of the Veterans Administration

Source: Library of Congress



Figure 15. General (Ret.) Eric Shinseki, current Secretary of Veterans Affairs

Source: Library of Congress

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